

# **Istook Statement on Balanced Budget Amendment**

**Press Conference -- October 6, 1999**

**"At the start of this year, Republicans stood alone in committing to two things—a balanced budget, and a refusal to use the Social Security trust fund for anything except Social Security. Because we stood solid, Democrats in Congress and the President eventually all joined us in saying that they share these commitments.**

**"Now that we're finishing work on the spending bills, it's clear now that even though everyone says these things, not everyone really means them. Too many here in Washington just want to spend more money, and don't care where it comes from. It's time to find out who is really serious, and who is simply posturing and pretending.**

**"Everybody who is sincere should support the only binding guarantee of these things. That is the Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution. This is what the American people have wanted for so long, the same provision passed in 1995 by over two-thirds of the House, and which came within two votes of Senate approval last term. To that identical language we have added only one thing—a simple provision that Social Security's surplus cannot be used for anything except Social Security. The budget must be balanced without dipping into Social Security. That is what both sides of the aisle and the President say they want. For any who don't really mean it, it's time to call their bluff.**

**"We are working with the House leadership to bring this to a prompt vote, while we are here this fall working on the budget. This is the perfect time. We're grateful for the support that is coming from the House leadership, and I refer you to the statements in your packets from Speaker Denny Hastert and Majority Leader Dick Armey. The exact date for the floor vote has not yet been set, but we expect it to be soon, within the next few weeks. In the meantime, we invite all Members of the House to join us as co-sponsors of the legislation [HJR 53], so their constituents won't have to wait until the vote to know where they stand.**

**"Everyone knows that for decades Congress and the White House have a long and sad history of evading all other safeguards. Sequestration, the Balanced Budget Act, Gramm-Rudman, Gramm-Rudman II, and so on have all been evaded. Because those were not put into the Constitution, they could not bind the President and Congress. As**

**simple laws, they could be changed by a majority vote whenever it was convenient. Only the constitutional amendment creates the safeguard that cannot be easily evaded.**

**"On votes earlier this year on this topic, virtually every member of Congress supported what this Constitutional Amendment will do. However, because those were only non-binding 'sense of Congress' resolutions, it was easy for Members of Congress to posture and give lip service to these goals, even if they didn't really mean it. ["Lock box" legislation passed 416-12. The Herger resolution, expressing the sense of Congress not to spend the Social Security surplus and to continue to retire the national debt, passed 417 -2.]**

**"We want the American people to know that this is not a one-time political ploy; this is a permanent commitment. This is the new standard for Washington:**

**--Every year we balance the budget.**

**--Every year we protect Social Security, and  
we don't spend it on anything else.**

**Anyone who won't make these permanent commitments will expose their true colors. The American people need to know who is trying to fool them in this budget debate.**

**"The Balanced Budget Amendment [HJR 53] has the identical safeguards that were worked out before the House approved this previously—such as the ability to make exceptions in time of war and when a super-majority of Congress finds there is a true national emergency.**

**"If this were part of the Constitution already, we wouldn't be having today's debates over more spending, or be looking for gimmicks to let us spend more. We would be bound by the Constitution to balance the budget without resorting to the Social Security trust fund—today, tomorrow, and forever.**

**"Our kids deserve a future without the crushing burden of a huge national debt. Our seniors deserve the security of knowing the Social Security trust fund cannot be used as a slush fund. All Americans deserve not only a balanced budget, but the leaner government that this will bring."**